

■ The 2000s | GREAT PLACES OF REFUGE AND RENEWAL



THANKS to the renewal and increase of State and County funding to pursue Governor Whitman's charge to preserve open space, the Park System preserved more land through acquisitions and easements in its fifth decade than in any of its previous decades. With help from non-profits and from other government partners, the Park System preserved 5,185 acres in the 2000s despite the intense competition for land that prevailed during the decade.

The demand for trail use in Monmouth is growing

The expansion and popularity of the Park System's trails was another defining characteristic of the decade. Park System staff more than doubled the total length of trails in the parks to over 130 miles. This expansion included extending the Henry Hudson Trail, adding the Union Transportation Trail, redesigning and extending paved and unpaved trails in several parks, and creating new trails in Perrineville Lake, Turkey Swamp, Thompson, and Holmdel Parks, in Sunnyside Recreation Area, and in Hominy Hill and Charleston Springs Golf Courses. The Park System contracted for the paved trails, but staff and volunteers completed all the work on the unpaved trails.



The Henry Hudson Trail illustrated the growing popularity of trails. More than 58,000 people hiked, jogged, or bicycled its nine-mile length in 2000, and its use doubled the following year. In 1991, the "Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan" had proposed extending the trail from Aberdeen to Freehold along an unused agricultural railroad right-of-way owned by New Jersey Transit. New Jersey Transit's announcement in 2000 that it would demolish several bridges along that right-of-way precipitated County action to add it to the Henry Hudson Trail. Noting that "the demand for trail use in Monmouth is growing," the Freeholders immediately authorized the Recreation Commissioners to negotiate a lease with N.J. Transit to use the 12-mile Matawan to Freehold right-of-way for "public pedestrian and bicycle use." Park System staff subsequently secured a grant from the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program to repair and rebuild 14 bridges and to make other improvements to this southern extension of the Henry Hudson Trail, which opened in 2005.

In a 2008-2009 public interest survey, Monmouth County residents rated trails as the most popular recreation facility in the Park System.

The answer became obvious: build an arena

In the fall of 2000, the 20-year collaboration between the Park System and SPUR—Special People United to Ride—mushroomed beyond nearly everyone's expectation thanks to a remarkable fundraising event that has enormously benefited hundreds of Monmouth County children and adults with disabilities. The Therapeutic Riding program, jointly sponsored by the Park System and SPUR at Huber Woods Park, had expanded significantly since its beginnings at Thompson Park in 1981. Demand for lessons kept growing, but the outdoor facility at Huber Woods, which had to close during winter, could not serve all those who wanted to participate.

Anne Miller, a riding instructor and a former SPUR President, recalled attending her first Board Meeting in the summer of 1997, "where then-President Melissa Friedman was leading a discussion about how SPUR could provide the benefits of therapeutic riding to its students year round. The answer became obvious: build an arena. For a Board of only 20 members who were used to holding bake sales and 50/50 raffles, this was quite a task to undertake. With a 'Why not?' attitude, the group marched forward. In 1998, we hosted an Asbury Park riding event and raised over \$30,000."

By 1999, when Anne was Vice President of SPUR, she mentioned to

Left: Trails like this one in Turkey Swamp Park have become the most popular recreation facilities in the Park System.

Opposite page: Manasquan Reservoir.

Tracy Boyle, a riding student of hers in Colts Neck, that SPUR needed someone to head fundraising efforts for the arena. As Tracy recalled,

I used to be deathly afraid of horses and had never been on a horse, but when I was 30, I really wanted to confront this fear. I loved horses but I was just afraid of being able to control one, the speed, and the height, all of it. A friend took me for a lesson on a wonderful older horse that just took me around and wasn't going to jump over anything, and I realized that confronting the fear was so much a self-confidence builder for me. I became impassioned by it and I wanted to learn how to jump and I wanted to own a horse.

As we were riding, she was talking about this handicapped riding facility that she was just getting involved with. In those days SPUR was open April to October. If it rained, you didn't ride. When you have a child with disabilities, what any parent will tell you is how important it is to be able to continue with something. You got so far with a child and then it was over because winter came and there was no way to continue. They could only take 30 students and they would have a wait list of up to 90 kids that wanted to participate. So we thought we would alleviate all of that when an indoor arena was built so we could serve every kid that signed up.

Tracy Boyle joined the SPUR Board and, as Anne Miller recalled, "Under the leadership of our then-President Arlene Newman, our relationship with the Park System grew even stronger and our dream of one day building an indoor arena was taking shape." By early 2000, Park System staff had developed a plan with Anne and other SPUR board members for a therapeutic riding complex with a 16,000 square foot arena and stables, outdoor riding rings, and a service area for riders and their families. Since the riding area at Huber Woods Park was too small for such a complex, Park System officials suggested locating it at the Sunnyside Recreation Area, which was designated for active recreation, easily accessible from County roads, and had large open fields.

The Park System and SPUR worked out an agreement for the Park System to build, operate, and staff the therapeutic riding complex if SPUR could raise the construction money. The Park System would cover staff and operating costs, and SPUR would provide volunteers, training, scholarships, horses, equipment, and amenities for riders and their families. The Park System design staff projected the construction cost at \$850,000—a huge amount for an organization that had \$15,000 in the bank and whose biggest fundraiser at the time had raised \$30,000, far short of the funding needed for such an ambitious project as Sunnyside.



Jon Bon Jovi, Tracy Boyle, Patti Scialfa, and Bruce Springsteen playing at the "Off to the Races" benefit for SPUR, October 21, 2000.

TRACY BOYLE *This room has just built a barn*

It's the invitation that comes in the mail and the way it's worded that gets people on board. The Springsteens have been part of this community for a while and I knew Patti Springsteen liked to ride, so I called her and talked to her about therapeutic riding and I asked her if she would consider being an honorary chairperson of the SPUR benefit, and she said yes. I asked Dorothea Bon Jovi to serve on the Benefit committee and she said yes, too.

I knew from past experience that if Bobby Bandiera, who's a fantastic local musician, is playing, the chances of Bruce and Jon Bon Jovi joining up and playing with him are extremely high, and Bobby agreed to play for us for next to nothing. We honored Julie Crone, the first female jockey in the Racing Hall of Fame, who used to be on the SPUR Board and was retiring from horse racing, and we produced a special video on her.

Jeannie Seuffert gave a talk—'Let me introduce you

to some of my SPUR friends'—and she spoke about the kids, saying, 'The Monmouth County Park System is making this possible with your help.' She is the one responsible for everybody opening their wallet and helping because she just does such a great job getting people excited about something she believes in.

At the auction that night, there were 11 items, but they were one-of-a-kind. Bruce Springsteen donated a one-hour private guitar lesson at his home that went for \$50,000. Then he auctioned off his own guitar and the whole thing just snowballed, and then the auction was over and I was able to say, 'Guess what? This room has just built a barn.' After the auction Bobby Bandiera was playing, and Bruce and Jon Bon Jovi got up and played with him for two straight hours with no break. The whole room was electrified.

I can't believe I live in a County where in one night people will come and make a powerful difference like this.

SPUR Board members launched a capital campaign in 2000 and, as Anne recalled, “Tracy took over the reins and, with incredible community support, we held a one-of-a-kind star-studded fundraiser on Saturday, October 21, at beautiful Hedgerow Stables in Middletown.” SPUR’s “Off to the Races” event raised \$750,000—the largest amount ever raised in the County in one day. As Tracy recalled, “Jim Truncer had said he thought it was going to take several years for us to raise that kind of money. It was a fun phone call for me to make to him on that Monday morning.”

What a great joint effort

Thanks to the generosity of “Off to the Races” patrons and volunteers, the Park System completed the Sunnyside Equestrian Center two years later, and SPUR and Park System staff celebrated the grand opening with three sold-out performances by Austria’s famed Royal Lipizzaner Stallions. With the new arena, as SPUR President Paige Metzger wrote in the organization’s spring 2003 newsletter, “We more than doubled the number of students we serve.” She thanked and congratulated “those Board members, Park System staff, volunteers, and students who accomplished all this—what a great joint effort!”

Two years later, SPUR hosted a “Down the Backstretch” event in a historic Middletown barn to raise funds to help expand the Equestrian Center with offices, reception and viewing areas, and instruction and volunteer rooms. As SPUR Board member Tracy Boyle later noted, “We



have something to be so proud of. I don’t think there’s another park system in the country that has a handicapped riding facility, a teaching facility like this one. The school systems are calling in droves to say, ‘Can we come show our kids what you do there?’” In 2009, the Equestrian Center’s staff and volunteers offered 130 riding programs primarily for individuals with disabilities but also for able-bodied riders.

More recreation opportunities available to more people

At the beginning of the decade Park System staff were presenting over 3,800 programs to more than 77,000 participants annually, including more than 10,000 underserved youth in their Recreation Assistance

Below left: The Royal Lipizzaner Stallions at the Sunnyside Equestrian Center opening in 2002.

Monmouth County Park System “Recreation Services Plan,” 2001

To provide year-round opportunities for persons of all ages, interests, and skills from throughout the County to engage in a variety of recreation activities, the Park System annually runs over 3,800 advertised and reserved programs in 11 categories:

Camps for children and teens with a variety of activities from sports to crafts to nature.

Crafts including cooking, photography, drawing and painting, ceramics, and origami.

Fitness and Sports including golf, tennis, in-line skating, swimming, aerobics, tai chi, and dance.

Gardening encompassing planting, display, and care of indoor and outdoor plants, plus trips to gardens and flower shows.

Historic programs to familiarize participants with the social and cultural practices of past life in Monmouth County, plus trips to historic sites and museums.

Nature programs on the environment and natural history, plus trips to natural areas and natural history museums.

Outdoor Adventures including hiking, biking, sailing, skiing, kayaking, and horseback riding.

Performing Arts instruction in theatre, music and dance, plus professional performances.

Self-improvement programs including managing money, resume writing, and interpersonal communication.

Travel programs to special places and sites.

Therapeutic programs in multiple categories for persons with physical or mental disabilities

To better fulfill the Visitor Services mission over the next five years:

- Commit a percentage of each program type to Urban and Community Recreation.
- Distribute programs by season for year-round recreation as much as possible.
- Distribute programs by age group to reflect population trends and expand offerings for mixed-age and family-size audiences.
- Create opportunities for mainstream participation by the therapeutic population.
- Adjust the number and location of programs to reflect the regional distribution of population within the County.
- Expand program offerings on environmental issues and practices and on gardening.
- Expand programs for wellness and active older adults.
- Expand internet access to program, event and facility information, and registration.

Program. To maximize these efforts, Superintendent of Recreation John Hoffman, Supervising Planner Faith Hahn, and other Park System staff studied population and recreation trends, community needs, and transportation issues, and they compiled their findings and recommendations in a Recreation Services Plan, which the Recreation Commissioners adopted in 2001. As John recalled, "It was a comprehensive review by the whole organization as far as the direction we would like to go with recreation in the Park System and specifically with Visitor Services programming."

Reflecting the County's growth to over 615,000 people and the diverse recreation opportunities within 36 parks spread over 12,000 acres, the Plan identified 26 actions to be implemented within 5 years. The plan, as Faith noted, focused on "making more recreation opportunities available to more people including our urban residents and people with special needs."

To increase year-round recreation opportunities for groups with special interests, including safe places for in-line skating and skateboarding, the Park System developed a Skateplex on recently-acquired land at the north end of Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park in Long Branch. The Skateplex, which opened in 2005, includes a skate park, an in-line skating rink, an open shelter, and a trail loop for skating, jogging, and walking.

Members of the Park System's Urban Recreation staff had been taking activities to urban areas for nearly 15 years. In 2003, to increase their services in Asbury Park, staff opened the Coastal Activity Center in the Salvation Army building, with regularly-scheduled art, nature, and physical recreation activities for specific age groups.

Skateplex at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park.



Coastal Activity Center in Asbury Park.

Full utilization of its recreational potential

In the fall of 2001, the Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center opened to the public—the culmination of several years of planning and design by Park System landscape architects and naturalists, in collaboration with consulting architects and exhibit designers. The project team, led by Supervising Landscape Architect Joe Sardonia, sited the new building on a peninsula with a spectacular view of the reservoir and focused its exhibits on wetlands ecology and wildlife and habitat protection. To orient visitors to the aquatic habitat of the area, team members created a simulated white cedar swamp and a pond at the building's entrance. They also developed hands-on exhibits on wetlands and woodlands and the ways in which people, plants, and animals use the water resources around them. The Friends of the Parks raised some of the funds for the exhibits, including a State grant and donations from corporations and individuals.

The Environmental Center's popularity with school groups and families helped raise the Manasquan Reservoir's annual visitation to over 400,000 and the Park System's overall visitation to more than four million for the first time in 2001. With its water, wildlife, nature education, and recreational opportunities, the Manasquan Reservoir became the Park System's most visited park in 2008. In 2009, it attracted more than 1.2 million people. County Planning Director Charles Pike would

certainly have been pleased to see the results of the recommendation he made in his "Recreation Study and Plan" in 1960 that "the Manasquan be developed for multiple use with full utilization of its recreational potential."

A quiet reserve

The Freeholders expanded the Board of Recreation Commissioners from seven to nine members in 2002 and asked them to develop a suitable memorial to the Monmouth County victims of the 2001 terrorist attacks. The County's September 11th Memorial Committee was chaired by architect Frank Tomaino and composed of members of victims' families and the community, Commissioners, and Park System support staff. From the time of the tragedy, people had gathered at the Mount Mitchell Scenic Overlook to view Manhattan in the distance and reflect on the losses, and the Committee selected the site for the County's 9/11 Memorial.

Monmouth County officials and Committee members dedicated the Memorial on Sunday, September 11, 2005, and unveiled its 4,500 lb. limestone eagle, poised in takeoff and clutching a beam from the World Trade Center. The Memorial honored each of the 147 Monmouth County victims with their names inscribed around the granite base of



the statue. Over 900 people visited the Overlook that day to quietly commemorate the victims. The Friends of the Parks had raised almost \$300,000 for the memorial's cost, and more than 588 individuals, businesses, and organizations had contributed to their 9/11 Memorial Fund. "I have observed a quiet reserve while at the eagle that seems to be shared by all visitors," said Frank Tomaino at the dedication.

Such a rewarding thing

In 2002, the Freeholders added the 125-acre Kostuk Farm to Charleston Springs Golf Course to buffer it from development and to provide trails for hiking and horseback riding. That spring, four years after the North Course opened at Charleston Springs, Dave Pease and his golf operations staff opened the South Course for limited play while the greens and fairways matured and while staff and contractors completed the 19,000-square foot Golf Center, designed by architect George Rudolph, for its May opening.

Above: Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center.

Left: Monmouth County's 9/11 Memorial at Mount Mitchell Scenic Overlook.



Above right: Golf Center at Charleston Springs Golf Course.

Above left: Dave Pease, the Park System's General Manager of Golf Courses at Hominy Hill Golf Course.



As Dave Pease recalled, "People were excited about Charleston Springs when we opened it, and we were excited too. Building the golf course showed what a great team we had in seeing this project through and in how we had grown and had been able to make sure we got the quality we wanted. I look at the Charleston Springs complex and it's such a rewarding thing." Joe Sardonía, who supervised the design and construction of the new golf course, was especially pleased with how the course "fits in with the landscape and reuses rain water for irrigation."

Monmouth County voters approved an increase in the County Open Space Trust funding in November, 2002, and the Freeholders announced a new Municipal Open Space Grant Program in 2003 with \$2 million in annual funding from the Open Space Trust. Freeholder Director Harry Larrison and Freeholder Theodore Narozanick championed the program to enable municipalities to preserve additional open space and provide more recreational opportunities for local residents. The Program provides 50% matching grants for up to \$250,000, with Urban-Aid municipalities eligible for 75% matching grants up to \$250,000. The Park System administers the Program for the Freeholders, who since its inception have awarded over \$12.7 million to 43 municipalities for 90 park acquisition and development projects.

The Park System received another important property donation

in 2003 when Alexander J. Adair, who passed away at the age of 85, bequeathed his residence and five acres adjacent to Hartshorne Woods Park to the County. Adair was a lifelong resident of Highlands who worked for the Post Engineers at Fort Monmouth and cherished his house and wooded property on the edge of the Highlands ridge overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Zoning regulations for the property would have permitted construction of 20 or more residential units but, after discussing preservation options with Park System and Monmouth Conservation Foundation staff members, Adair decided to donate the entire property in honor of his father, John Berry Adair, with the right to remain living there for the rest of his life. The Adair donation preserved a key buffer on the east edge of Hartshorne Woods Park.

The realization of a dream come true

In 2004, Another Park System collaboration realized its goals when the Freeholders and Recreation Commissioners joined Paul and Margo Hooker of Challenged Youth Sports to celebrate the opening of Challenger Place, a universally-accessible playground at Dorbrook Recreation Area. Mr. and Mrs. Hooker had founded Challenged Youth Sports in 1990 to provide sports programs for children with special needs. They reached out to Park System staff to work together on a barrier-

free playground after receiving a letter from a 4th grader at Nut Swamp School in Middletown who wrote, "Do you know anyone who can get a playground made for disabled kids for our school? I think they should be able to play on playgrounds also. They deserve it. Just because they're disabled doesn't mean they can't have fun on playgrounds. Please help them."

Recreation Commissioner Dr. Anthony Musella, a Middletown dentist, thought that replacing the traditional playground at Dorbrook with a barrier-free playground would be a milestone in the Park System's commitment to serving youngsters with special needs. The Commissioners agreed to work with the Hookers and the non-profit Boundless Playgrounds organization from Connecticut to create Challenger Place, a play environment for all children, but with accessible features for children with disabilities.

At the Challenger Place opening, Jim Truncer credited the volunteers who spearheaded the project, "Through the tireless leadership efforts of Paul and Margo Hooker and Anthony and Mariann Musella, Challenged Youth Sports raised over \$150,000 from more than 250 individuals and businesses, and this one-of-a-kind playground is now a reality." For the volunteers and for many others, as an *Asbury Park Press* reporter noted, the ribbon cutting was "the realization of a dream come true."

A month later the Park System opened its first Sprayground, just to the east of Challenger Place. Visitors splashing in and out of water-activated structures, fountains, and showers, as an *Asbury Park Press* reporter noted, quickly found it "a great place to be cool and play with water. . . parents and children frolicked together in the spray and sun from opening to closing." A 13-year old visitor from Rumson told the reporter, "It's pretty cool that they would build something like this. It's a great park."

A major coalition of open space advocates and agencies realized its goal in the spring of 2005 with the preservation of the 45-acre Stern Fisher property as an addition to Hartshorne Woods Park in Middletown Township. With its long frontage on Claypit Creek and magnificent view of the Navesink River, the property's high value necessitated the collaboration of multiple partners to preserve it.

Below left: Challenger Place opening at Dorbrook Recreation Area, June 2004. Tony Musella is at center, with red tie.

Below right: Sprayground at Dorbrook Recreation Area.





Above: The addition of the Stern Fisher property to Hartshorne Woods Park provides waterfront access to Claypit Creek and the Navesink River.

Right: Thompson Park Visitor Center fire, February 6, 2006.

Middletown Township contributed to the acquisition cost, and Mayor Joan A. Smith said, “We’ve been working closely with the County, State and the Monmouth Conservation Foundation for several years to preserve this land. Residents, including a class of fourth graders from Navesink Elementary School, had written asking us to preserve it. We are very happy to finally work out an agreement that benefits everyone. It’s an incredible piece of property with scenic views and wooded spots that should and will forever belong to the public.”

The Monmouth Conservation Foundation also contributed a significant amount to the project, and when the Trustees held their 28th annual dinner dance at the property later that year, President Judith Stanley Coleman told the crowd, “Preservation of Stern Fisher has been a dream for Foundation members for 15 years, and now it has finally become a reality.” The County used Open Space Trust Funds and a grant from the State’s Harbor and Estuary Program to complete the purchase.

The Park System and the Monmouth Conservation Foundation completed another joint acquisition effort in 2006 with the addition of the

99-acre Timolat Farm to Huber Woods Park. The Green Acres program provided matching grants to both the County and the Foundation to support this purchase. Sloping upward from Navesink River Road, the old farm contains the McClees Creek basin with five ponds along its western boundary, and according to Foundation Trustee Larry Fink, “woods and fields that are spectacular.”

At the announcement, Foundation Trustee Holly Annarella Boylan said, “instead of the 15 housing lots that it could have become, the farm will be here for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.” With the Stern Fisher and Timolat Farm additions to County parklands, visitors can now hike through some three and a half miles of woods and meadows from the southwestern corner of Huber Woods Park to the southeastern corner of Hartshorne Woods Park.

Keeping her legacy alive

On a cold, windy day in February, 2006, the Park System suffered a loss unprecedented in its five decades. A contractor who was improperly soldering a downspout on the Thompson Park Visitor Center, as part of the finishing touches on its renovation, sparked a fire that destroyed the building. The many staff members working in the building that morning exited safely as the fire rapidly gained intensity.

While everyone was relieved that no one had been injured, the



tragedy was particularly difficult for the Visitor Center staff who had fled the fire and lost records and photographs representing decades of work and of Park System history, as well as for all those who had labored for years on the planning and execution of the building's careful renovation.

Assistant Director Bruce Gollnick summed up the loss in the May-June, 2006 issue of *Green Heritage*, "The Visitor Center had been the Park System's flagship facility for more than 38 years and represented the County's commitment to preserving the area's rich and colorful history. It's a heartbreaking loss for the Monmouth community."

Many members of the community shared personal memories of "Mrs. Thompson's house" with the Park System and expressed their desire that it should be rebuilt to look like the former mansion. Freeholder Lillian Burry felt strongly that the Park System should reconstruct the building with fire insurance proceeds, and her fellow Freeholders and the Recreation Commissioners unanimously agreed. As Gail Hunton, Park System Historic Preservation Specialist, noted in *Green Heritage*, "Recognizing the importance of Geraldine Thompson's home, where she spent so many active days in service to the community, is part of keeping her legacy alive."

With the support of the Freeholders and the community at large, Park System staff immediately began the process of reconstructing the Thompson Park Visitor Center, starting with the salvage of elements from the burned building to use in accurate replications for the new building and hiring historic architects to design the new Visitor Center in the likeness of the landmark mansion.

The improvement of our collective quality of life

After reviewing the County's open space objectives and conferring with State and municipal officials, non-profit organizations, and private citizens, a team of Park System administrators and professional staff including Faith Hahn, Andrew Coeyman, and Andy North produced a new "Monmouth County Open Space Plan" in 2006 to guide the Park System's land acquisitions over the next five years. With County parklands then totaling more than 13,000 acres, the team identified some 6,100 acres to be acquired for conservation and recreation purposes, about 10% of the 60-70,000 acres of undeveloped land in the County. As Jim Truncer noted in the Plan's Foreword,

The landscape of Monmouth County is changing. Forests and fields are being developed. New houses and buildings replace treasured

landmarks. Favorite woods and streams are now someone's back yard. Traffic is increasing. Sprawl is everywhere around us. While we each have a personal vision of Monmouth County in the future, I believe that we are all united in the view of a permanent landscape that includes open space for recreational pursuits, protection of water resources, preservation of natural areas, and the improvement of our collective quality of life. This is the goal of the County Open Space Plan.

The new Open Space Plan, which the County Planning Board and Recreation Commissioners adopted in August, 2006, identified five new park sites to meet future open space and recreation needs, including part of Fort Monmouth, which the U.S. Army is decommissioning, and sites in Tinton Falls, Middletown, and Marlboro. To protect water resources and to buffer existing County parkland, the Plan also recommended expanding 13 parks, including substantial additions to Perrinville Lake Park, the Yellow Brook Tract, Crosswicks Creek Greenway, Big Brook Park, Charleston Springs Golf Course, Turkey Swamp Park, and Hominy Hill Golf Course.

Once open space is gone, we can't get it back

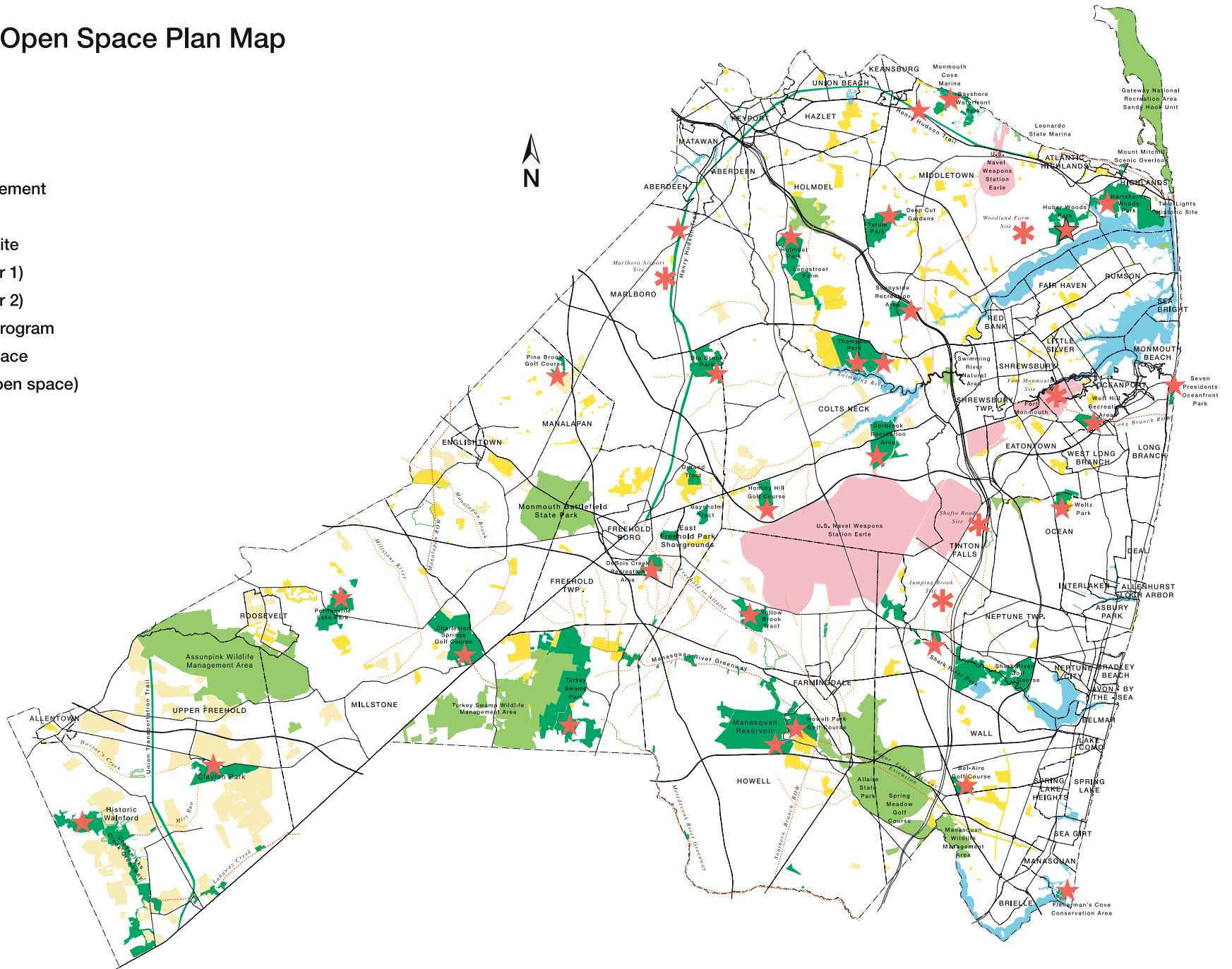
To fulfill the land preservation goals of the Open Space Plan, the Board of Chosen Freeholders decided in the summer of 2006 to seek voter approval to convert the existing \$16 million in annual open space tax revenues for the Open Space Trust Fund to a fixed rate of 1.5 cents for each \$100 of equalized assessed property valuation. In announcing the referendum, Freeholder Director William C. Barham said that, "As it stands now, we are unable to acquire as much property as we would like because the cost of the land is increasing each year while our funding remains the same. Switching to a percentage rate allows us to keep pace with rising costs. This change will put us on a more solid footing for acquiring and preserving open space."

Community representatives such as Judith Stanley Coleman, President of the Monmouth Conservation Foundation, formed the Monmouth County Open Space 2006 Committee to promote passage of this key ballot question. Earlier that year, Mrs. Coleman had written to Foundation members about the urgency of action, "This is a crisis not only of open space but also of our well-being. As populations increase, preserving open space is no longer just about saving landscapes and wildlife, but about saving our quality of life, our health, and our environment from the persistent problems of land, water, and air pollution. Let's save Monmouth County before it's too late."

Monmouth County Open Space Plan Map

Legend

- County Open Space
- County Open Space Easement
- ★ Proposed County Park
- ✳ Proposed County Park Site
- Proposed Greenway (Tier 1)
- Proposed Greenway (Tier 2)
- Farmland Preservation Program
- Federal & State Open Space
- Federal Property (non-open space)
- Municipal Open Space *



* Municipal Open Space data layer is incomplete as digital data was not available from all municipalities.

This map contains digital data provided by the State of New Jersey and Monmouth County. Unauthorize duplication is prohibited.

Thanks to the efforts of the Monmouth Conservation Foundation, the Open Space 2006 Committee, the Friends of the Parks, and to broad public support for open space, 65% of County voters approved the fixed-rate ballot question in the November, 2006 election, providing a strong vote of confidence for the County's program of acquiring parklands, preserving farmland and historic sites, creating recreational opportunities, and protecting water resources.

In the fall of 2006, the Monmouth Conservation Foundation celebrated its 29th anniversary with a fundraising event at the Timolat addition to Huber Woods Park, continuing its tradition of holding events at recently-preserved sites. Since 1977, the Foundation had helped preserve over 3,100 acres in Monmouth County, with more than 1,800 acres conveyed to the Park System. As Mrs. Coleman told the participants at the event, "The County needs to continue its aggressive purchase of open space. Once open space is gone, we can't get it back."

Freeholder Emeritus

After serving as Freeholder for 21 years and with more than 60 years of public service, Theodore Narozanick retired at the end of 2006, and the Freeholders appropriately awarded him "Freeholder Emeritus" status, a first for the Board. Freeholder Director William Barham said, "We are all very fortunate that Ted chose to give his life and energy to Monmouth County because he improved the quality of life for everyone." From his youth in rural Englishtown, Narozanick learned the value of open space, and throughout his seven 3-year terms on the Board, he was an unswerving proponent of open space preservation and supporter of the Park System. In 1985, during his first term, Freeholder Narozanick proposed the first County Open Space tax in the state and then worked to get state enabling legislation passed after Monmouth voters had approved the referendum. In a 2004 interview, he reflected on the growth of the Park System, which he considers one of his proudest achievements.

Most people are encouraged that we've got a tremendously important parks and recreation system.

If you went out today and conducted interviews on the street, and asked people, 'What do you think of the parks, how do you like them?' they would overwhelmingly give us the top rating that they could give us. That's how much people love the parks and recreation system, and they have confidence in it and that's shown



Freeholder Ted Narozanick presents a proclamation for Parks and Recreation Month to Kathleen Ragauckus and Glenn Reilly of the Park System, July 13, 1989.

by the attendance record. So, it's really a tremendously important aspect of County government.

I think a lot of our success has to do with the good spirit and pride of our employees. They understand what the Park System does and what it stands for. They're treated fairly, and they're respected and admired. They're really energetic and dedicated, and all of them do a great job for the Park System. Many letters come through where people have complimented our park rangers and employees for helping them in a particular problem or a situation, being very courteous and so forth, and it's great to see that type of a letter.

I'm very proud of our parks and recreation.

Inspiring us

Volunteers and visitors affirmed the popularity of County parks with significant achievements in 2007. In March of that year, Freeholder Deputy Director Lillian G. Barry presented Volunteer Service Awards recognizing extraordinary contributions to the Park System during 2006 by many generous individuals. Catherine Barry of Deal surpassed the 3,000-hour mark as a volunteer trip leader and program and office assistant, and three people contributed more than 2,000 hours of their

Below left: Freeholder Director Lillian Burry and Recreation Commission Chairman Edward Loud with Volunteer Service Award winner Catherine Barry (center), March 2007.

Below right: Freeholder Director Lillian Burry and Recreation Commission Chairman Edward Loud with Valerie Yannuzzi, the Park System's '100 millionth visitor,' at Holmdel Park in June 2007.

time—Louise DelCollo of Colts Neck in Therapeutic Recreation, James Henry of Middletown at Deep Cut Gardens, and Doris Tierney of Eatontown in Outdoor Recreation.

In 2006 over 1,000 individuals volunteered in park activities ranging from summer theater to building boardwalks on trails, guiding groups of visitors at historic sites, and assisting with programs for individuals with disabilities. Freeholder Burry thanked all the volunteers for “lending the Monmouth County Park System a hand, touching our lives, and inspiring us to create a better quality of life for people of all ages and walks of life.”

By June of 2007 total visitation to Monmouth County parks had passed 100 million in the 46 years since the Freeholders opened the first county park, Shark River Park, in 1961. Freeholder Burry, Recreation Commission Chairman Edward Loud, and Park System staff greeted a symbolic ‘100 millionth visitor’ at Holmdel Park, Valerie Yannuzzi, who turned out to be a first-time visitor. Valerie, who was accompanied by her two young children, said, “Several of my friends have been raving about Holmdel Park for some time, and this was the first chance we’ve had to visit. The playground is terrific; it’s shaded, clean, and safe. The big and small play areas make it perfect for my children.” In 2007, Monmouth County Parks welcomed a record 5 million visitors.

A unique opportunity

In August, 2007, after many months of conferring with local, County, and State officials and reviewing proposals for future uses of the land and facilities at Fort Monmouth, Elyse LaForest, manager of the National Park Service’s Federal Lands to Parks program, announced the agency’s approval of the Park System’s application to acquire 351 acres at Fort Monmouth. Working closely with officials from Eatontown, Oceanport, and Tinton Falls, the Park System targeted four areas within the Fort’s 1,100 acres for active and passive recreation, including a youth center with gymnasium, an outdoor 25-meter swimming pool, a football complex, a bowling center, ball fields, meeting spaces, picnic areas, and a playground. The application also listed two facilities—a marina and a golf course—for conservation easements so that they would not be developed in the future for other uses. As Ms. LaForest stated in the announcement,

We have determined that the highest and best use in the public’s interest of the requested parcels is for park and recreation purposes. The County’s acquisition of the property will satisfy the public’s need for active and passive recreational facilities in an



area of increasing population and density. The closure of Fort Monmouth presents a unique opportunity to add open space and recreational facilities in an area that is currently underserved for similar facilities and where open land does not exist.

Park System operation of these first-class facilities for public use will optimize the Army's long-term investment and continue the Fort's tradition of professional management of its recreational facilities. The Park System's stewardship of the Fort's open fields and forested wetlands will ensure permanent protection of these natural resources. The Fort Monmouth Final Reuse and Redevelopment Plan, adopted in September, 2008, is largely consistent with the Park System's application. Federal action on the Plan, including transfer of Fort Monmouth property to the County, is pending. Fort Monmouth is currently slated for closing in 2011.

New Jersey and Monmouth County voters approved the State's twelfth open space bond act in 2007, dedicating \$200 million for the Garden State Preservation Trust to preserve open space, farmland, and historic buildings. The 2006 "Monmouth County Open Space Plan" provided the acquisitions staff with a number of properties that might be suitable for potential Green Acres funding from this bond act.

In October, 2008, Monmouth County lost one of its most ardent proponents of county history and parks when Daniel Ward Seitz died at the age of 77. Seitz was a direct descendant of Richard Hartshorne, one of the first Europeans to settle in the region during the late 1600s, and a long-time resident of Portland Place, his family's ancestral home in the Locust section of Middletown.

A founding member of the Hartshorne Woods Association, which had advocated preservation of the woods as county parkland since the 1960s, Seitz was also a trustee of the Monmouth County Historical Association for more than 40 years. He took great pride in being one of the first members of the Friends of the Parks, serving on the Board from 1992 until his death and as Friends President from 1993 to 1995.

In the ultimate demonstration of his commitment to preserving land and historic sites, Seitz donated Portland Place and its 4.7 acres to the Park System, writing in his will, "This historic property known as Portland Place, which it has been my good fortune to enjoy, will be used for educational, conservation, and museum purposes only by the Monmouth County Park System as a complement to Hartshorne Woods Park... in honor of the values which Richard Hartshorne, the first of the family to come to America and to build on this land, exemplified by his actions in public service."



Dan Seitz at Portland Place in 2006.

Strive to stay ahead

To help the Park System gauge the needs and interests of the public it serves, the Recreation Commissioners contracted with a nationally-recognized survey research firm to conduct the "Monmouth County Citizen Opinion and Interest Survey" over the winter of 2008-2009. Survey participants identified the 'preservation of open space and the environment' and the 'protection of forested areas from development' as the two top benefits that parks provide, and more than 90% favored the 'continued acquisition of open space.' Respondents also indicated that they used County parks for indoor and outdoor recreation more than any other public or private facilities, with 91% of them having visited County Parks within 12 months of the survey date.

Trails and playgrounds ranked as the most popular facilities, and 51% of those surveyed rated the condition of County parks as 'excellent,' compared to a national average of 30%, while 46% rated the condition of County parks as 'good.' The survey results indicated that the Park System needs to improve the rate of program participation, increase brand recognition, and educate the public about how parks and

recreation promote good health and physical fitness. The Park System received the highest rating for customer satisfaction ever recorded by the research firm, with 45% of participants describing themselves as 'very satisfied' with the overall value they received, nearly double the national average of 24%.

In March, 2009, the Park System received its fourth 5-year accreditation from CAPRA—the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies, which noted in its report,

The Park System is rich with institutional knowledge and, despite the longevity of employees, the agency has continued to strive to stay ahead of trends and best practices. Their focus on natural resources coupled with the strength of the Friends groups and citizen support have allowed the agency to preserve open space and educate the public about the value of parks and recreation. The Acquisition and Design Division has an exceptional process of planning for continuing open space acquisition plus a comprehensive design program for capital repair and improvement to agency facilities.

Having a personnel director on staff and having detailed procedures for personnel management is another strength of the agency. Orienting new personnel and providing employee housing are beneficial to the agency and employees. The inventory and diversity of facilities and organization of maintenance department and the agency's internal budgeting and development process are comprehensive and forward thinking. Administrative space is both functional and contributory towards the mission of the agency.

Proudly resumes its place

On a perfect summer day in July, 2009, County officials and Park System staff welcomed almost 400 people who came to celebrate the dedication of the new Thompson Park Visitor Center. As the *Asbury Park Press* noted, "Geraldine Thompson certainly would have approved," of the Park System's on-schedule and on-budget reconstruction of her 1896 mansion that burned to the ground in 2006. Rebuilt entirely with the County's insurance claim settlement, the new Visitor Center replicates many of the original historic features, with some expanded public rooms and full accessibility. Freeholder Lillian Burry told the assembled guests, "The new Visitor Center respects the historic

character of the former building and honors Geraldine Thompson's legacy to the people of Monmouth County. Today, three years after the fire, this mansion proudly resumes its place as the 'crown jewel' of the County Park System."

County and Park officials and many County residents gathered in November, 2009, to dedicate Tony's Place, a nearly one-third acre playground at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park in Long Branch that includes special adaptive equipment for children with disabilities. As they had done five years earlier for Challenger Place at Dorbrook Recreation Area, Paul and Margo Hooker raised approximately \$140,000 through their non-profit Challenged Youth Sports to help pay for this playground. Park System officials located the playground, which staff landscape architect Richard Pillar designed, at Seven Presidents because of its high visitation and urban location. The Recreation Commissioners named the new playground in honor of the late Dr. Anthony "Tony" Musella, one of their former members who championed recreation opportunities for children with special needs.

As Freeholder Director Barbara J. McMorrow said at the dedication, "The Park System works to provide us with safe, clean, and environmentally friendly places to recreate, but this particular playground is even more meaningful because it is named for someone who cared about and understood the needs of individuals with disabilities. Tony Musella left a legacy that we are very proud to honor and carry forward." Dr. Musella had served as a Recreation Commissioner for 13 years, including a term as vice chairman, before his premature death in 2006. His wife, Mariann Musella, said that, "Tony would have been quite pleased that another playground has been created for all the children in our county."

Despite the economic downturn in 2009, voters in Monmouth County and New Jersey approved the Garden State Preservation Trust Bond Act, the State's thirteenth open space referendum, for \$400 million. Since the first Green Acres Bond Act of 1961, State and County voters have approved nearly \$3.4 billion of grants and low interest loans for State, county, and municipal preservation of open space, farmland, flood zones, and historic sites. In its first five decades, the Park System received from these bond acts \$31.3 million in grants and \$26.5 million in loans for land acquisition, plus \$1.2 million for park development projects, for a total of \$59 million. The Park System was awarded \$2.4 million in historic preservation grants from several of the bond acts for three of its historic sites.

The Monmouth Conservation Foundation, other land preservation groups, and many municipalities in the County have received millions of dollars in grants from the 13 bond acts. With the hundreds of thousands of acres and the many historic sites preserved throughout the State, it is no wonder that Green Acres is widely recognized as the most successful public open space preservation program in the United States, and future generations will increasingly value this impressive legacy.

By the end of its first 50 years in 2009, the Park System had preserved 14,646 acres within County parks, plus another 1,987 acres through easements, for a total of 16,633 acres of preserved open space. The Park System offered 4,235 recreational and cultural programs in 2009, and program attendance reached 99,733. Annual visitation at County Parks climbed 3% in 2009 to reach its highest level ever—5,282,469 visitors. Nearly 900 volunteers working in 1,315 positions contributed 21,003 hours of their time in 2009 to enhancing the Park System and the experience of its visitors. Another 54 volunteers contributed 458 hours to helping the Friends of the Parks raise funds and undertake projects to improve the Park System.

Since its creation, the Park System has benefited not only from donations of time and talent but also from transfers and gifts of land as well as other personal property. The value of donations in 2009 totaled more than \$7 million. To date, the total value of donations received in support of the Park System, based upon the value as of the date of donation, has exceeded \$38 million.

Park System revenue surpassed \$14 million in 2009, with over \$9 million coming from the County's six golf courses and \$1.9 million from recreational programs and activities. The Park System is exploring innovative ways to increase this revenue, which sustains basic operations and reduces dependence on general County tax revenues. The dual task of providing quality programs and activities, while at the same time generating revenue to help support the Park System's overall budget, reflects the need for government agencies to be more entrepreneurial as municipal, County, and State budgets are all under stress. Through the continued support of the Freeholders and the citizens of Monmouth County, and with the development of various sources of revenue, the Park System will continue to provide Monmouth County residents with quality facilities and services and free access to their County park lands.



Above: Thompson Park Visitor Center opening, July 12, 2009.



Left: Thompson Park Day.

The next fifty years

Joseph Irwin, Charles Pike, and all the other County leaders who 50 years ago envisioned a system of open space and recreation in Monmouth County would be gratified to see today what their vision inspired. The outstanding natural, historical, and recreational resources that now comprise the Park System are their legacy and the legacy of all the donors, citizens, officials, staff, volunteers, and partners who have contributed to building what many people consider to be one of the finest county park systems in the United States.

In contemplating the next 50 years of providing open space and recreation, the people of Monmouth County must remain committed to a strong system of County parks to preserve and protect their rich natu-

Below: Holmdel Park.

Opposite page: Tatum Park.



ral environment and cultural resources and to provide superior recreation facilities for all residents. Continued sound fiscal management, ongoing investment, strong professional leadership, and active public support will all be necessary to build on the Park System's exceptional record of preservation, stewardship, and service.

Preservation

The need to preserve critical and special open spaces in Monmouth County will continue as increases in population and density place more stress on our natural resources and generate more demand for recreation. With technological progress, more and more people will be working, shopping, learning, and interacting with each other from homes, and they will increasingly seek open space and recreation to balance their lives.

Preservation priorities will continue to include: greenways along the County's major stream corridors to protect water supply and habitat for plants and wildlife; special natural resources of fields and forests, water and wetlands, marshes and coastlines to preserve the local and regional ecology; open spaces adjacent to existing parks to protect them from encroachments; and linkages connecting parks and communities.

Smart preservation strategies that pool talent and resources from governments, non-profits, and private citizens will become ever more important as growing demands for all kinds of services place increasing burdens on public resources.

Among the preservation opportunities on the horizon, the acquisition of surplus property at Fort Monmouth following its scheduled closing in 2011 holds great promise to convert quality military recreation facilities to public use, create new year-round facilities, and preserve natural areas in the populated Coastal Region of the County, which will continue to grow in density. The anticipated transfer of land from Fort Monmouth to the Park System will follow the precedent of similar transfers of former military sites that are now key components of Hartshorne Woods, Holmdel, and Tatum Parks.

Stewardship

The Park System's stewardship of the lands it holds and manages for the public will become increasingly valuable as parks gradually become islands of public open space within denser land uses. Staff

initiatives in ecological management will need to grow significantly as science, technology, and collaborations expand the possibilities for conserving natural resources.

The Park System's stewardship of historic resources will also gain importance as more and more historic sites succumb to modern development. While careful and authentic preservation of the physical fabric of the County's historic sites must continue to be a priority, the importance of interpreting their meaning to the public will increase as fewer and fewer sites remain to convey the County's rich heritage to future generations.

The stewardship of infrastructure and facilities with a commitment to quality must continue to be a hallmark of Monmouth County parks and will be enhanced by technological and managerial innovations.

Service

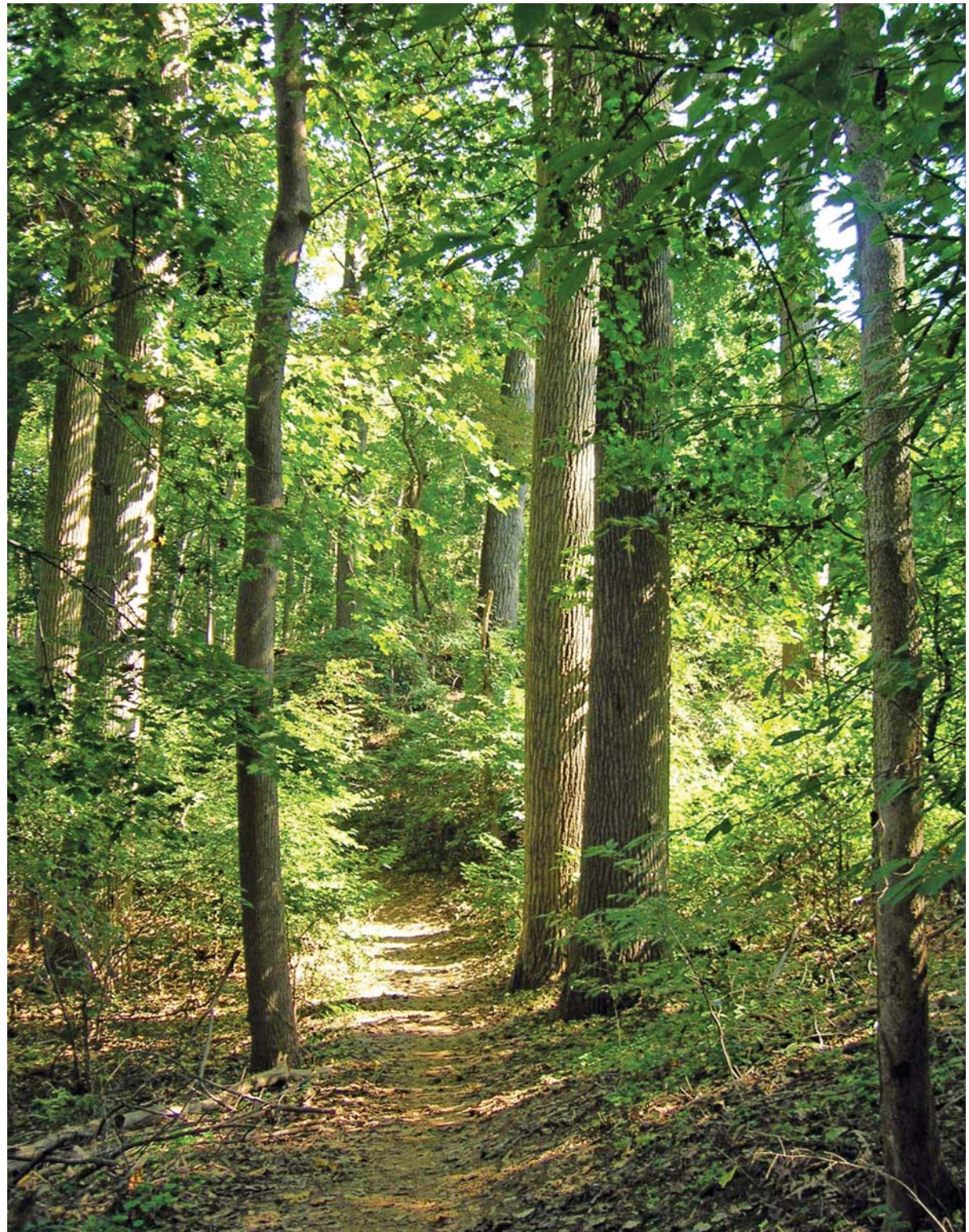
The Park System's commitment to provide diverse recreational opportunities for people of all ages and of varying abilities will need to capitalize on innovative ways to use facilities, technologies, and human resources. Recreational programs and activities must continue to evolve to meet the changing needs and demands of an increasingly diverse and dense population.

Linkages and transportation between parks and communities will become increasingly important to maximize public and private investment in the parks and to serve a growing population.

The Park System's entrepreneurial focus on collaborations and on raising revenue from users to help support operations will grow as the need to maximize the use of public funds increases over time.

Park System staff, both behind the scenes and on the front line, have enhanced the organization's reputation by their professionalism and pleasant interaction with visitors. This tradition will continue to grow as employees embrace their work of being stewards of natural and historic places and sharing them with the public in meaningful ways.

Service is a fitting note on which to conclude this history of the Monmouth County Park System's first 50 years. The System's founders and all the people who have built it, donated their assets and time to it, and have operated it over the last five decades have all shared a common goal—to serve the public in Monmouth County with the best open space and recreation experiences possible. Their legacy is visible throughout the County, and future generations will cherish and expand it.



The County Parks In 2009: Acreage By Category

Open Lands

Baysholm Tract.....	71
Yellow Brook Tract.....	338

Recreation Areas

DeBois Creek Recreation Area.....	165
Dorbrook Recreation Area.....	535
Sunnyside Recreation Area.....	135
Wolf Hill Recreation Area.....	92

Regional Parks

Bayshore Waterfront Park.....	227
Big Brook Park.....	379
Clayton Park.....	437
Hartshorne Woods Park.....	793
Holmdel Park.....	565
Huber Woods Park.....	376
Perrineville Lake Park.....	928
Shark River Park.....	957
Tatum Park.....	366
Thompson Park.....	667
Turkey Swamp Park.....	2,143

Special Use Areas

Deep Cut Gardens.....	54
East Freehold Showgrounds.....	81
Historic Longstreet Farm.....	9
Historic Walnford.....	36
Manasquan Reservoir.....	1,204
Monmouth Cove Marina.....	11
Mount Mitchell Scenic Overlook.....	12
Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park.....	38

Unclassified

Durand Tract (leased to Freehold Twp.).....	94
Weltz Park.....	165

Conservation Area

Fisherman's Cove.....	55
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Golf Courses

Bel-Aire.....	114
Charleston Springs.....	781
Hominy Hill.....	262
Howell Park.....	311
Pine Brook.....	61
Shark River.....	176

Greenways

Crosswicks Creek.....	1,444
Henry Hudson Trail.....	100
Manasquan River.....	337
Metedeconk River.....	121
Union Transportation Trail.....	6

Total acres owned and/or managed by the Park System..... 14,646*

EASEMENTS..... 1,987

TOTAL ACRES PRESERVED..... 16,633

**This number includes 1,135 park acres under the following Use Agreements: 1,052 acres at the Manasquan Reservoir owned by the NJ Water Supply Authority and leased to the Park System for perpetual use; 83 acres of the Henry Hudson Trail are county-owned and managed by Park System.*

